On the Way to the Final Frontier

by Tylla Bradley

The 1960s were a time of hope and change. People looked to the future hoping that cars would fly, medical problems would be instantly healed, and people could travel anywhere in an instant. *Star Trek* showed a world that seemed to successfully resolve social, religious, and economic differences with peace and understanding while promoting equality and discouraging war. It spoke of a peaceful and prosperous society. A life without riots, mutually assured destruction, and nuclear threats. All this within the grasp of the generation's descendents, if only they stayed the course and believed.

Now, nearly fifty years later, not only do cars not fly, medical problems are still painful life-changing events, and travel is anything but instantaneous. And, as America gradually learned that the idea of hope is entirely different than actually having hope and began to reconcile that the fantastical prosperity of a *Star Trek* future was a fantasy.

What happened?

The real world. The world where cars don't fly, tricorders don't exist, and you can't be pulled out of a tight situation by a particularly adept teleporter operator. War and genocide have happened, happen and will continue to happen. What does saving one or one million do in the face of the senseless slaughter of millions. People die of diseases that should have been cured or have easily accessible cures but for the interference of politicians, bureaucrats, and businessmen. Diplomacy is a temporary solution at best, and more often than not a failing one. And, even when things are going well, natural disasters spring forth, despite the best efforts of earnest environmentalists and scientists who warn about the damage done to the planet.

Against all odds, Americans have the firm belief that the good will win at the end of the day. And why not, the founding of the country was based on the hopeful idea of freedom. Wars have been fought throughout the history of the country in the name of this idea and to spread the idea to other lands. With hope comes the ability to bear what is happening today and what will happen tomorrow. It's a trait that is common in humanity and held to with an almost religious ferocity in Americans.

However, the raw realities of life where inventing a tricorder is less practical than designing a better gun. Cars don't fly, but tanks are faster and fighter jets silent and more deadly. The progress and imagination of the 1960s was sacrificed on the altar of martial advancement. When survival hangs in the balance, what good is learning how to cure cancer when you might not exist to get cancer? Thanks to the Vietnam War, the generation that their parents hoped, saved and sacrificed for was either sent to war or dedicated their lives to protesting and enacting social change.

No matter the time or circumstances, Americans have always been desperate to hang onto the illusion of hope. This desire is best reflected in one of America's democratic unique features, the presidency. Americans look to their leader to be the bastion of hope in the darkest times. And why not? During presidential campaigns, Americans vote for leaders who promise light at the end of the tunnel and a return to the better days of the past. Jimmy Carter was "a leader, for a change"; Ronald Reagan proclaimed, "It's morning again in America"; and Bill Clinton told Americans, "Don't stop thinking about tomorrow." Most recently, in a time of war and economic uncertainty, Americans flocked to Barack Obama, the lone candidate who promised the one thing that Americans needed, hope. While it is debatable that the leaders were able to fulfill their campaign promises, they were able to maintain the waning hope of the American people.

In times like today, renewing hope is a difficult and uphill battle. As unemployment soars, wars are fought on two continents, and people struggle for their very existence, believing that better days are coming seems like a laughable exercise in futility. And, in times like these, leaders provide the push in the right direction. As President Barack Obama said as he campaigned for the presidency, "Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek."

In the 60s, space was the final frontier and TV was the place America went to continue on this adventure. For nearly fifty years some version of *Star Trek* captured America's attention, whether on the big screen, TV, or at a nearby convention, the Starfleet uniform was worn with pride. However, in 2005, Gene Roddenberry's brainchild disappeared from the modern media landscape. There was no TV show, no movie premiere, people had moved on, leaving Roddenberry's illustrative and idealistic universe to the faithful few who gathered religiously to discuss *Star Trek* minutiae and wear their uniforms proudly.

And then, it was back!

In a colossal multi-million dollar affair revamped and amped for a new generation. *Star Trek,* for the new millennium and the next generation, from the visionary imagination of J.J. Abrams.

But, is it enough? Is a revamping of *Star Trek* another push up the long, arduous hill toward hope and prosperity? Who knows? The only certainty today is as Chancellor Gorkon says In *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country*, "we have a long way to go," and the President agrees.